LISTEN, TEACH, SEND

A National Pastoral Framework for

Ministries with Youth and with Young Adults

FINAL VERSION

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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FOREWORD

Most Reverend Robert E. Barron, *Chairman*
Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

It is a great moment of joy to share *Listen, Teach, Send: A National Pastoral Framework for Ministries with Youth and Young Adults* with the People of God across the United States.

This framework is intended for Catholic pastors, pastoral leaders, and families to be a source of inspiration and motivation for engaging and accompanying youth and young adults. The U.S. Bishops hope that it will be a catalyst for ministerial growth and investment in young people.

Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Christus Vivit* (2019), which was the Holy Father's own response to a synodal process of listening and journeying with youth and young adults, has been a significant source of inspiration for the bishops as we have explored how pastoral ministries with younger generations can be both effective and fruitful in our country.

Readers will also note that the bishops begin the framework with a direct address to young people, as we believe that youth and young adults themselves are significant agents of these ministries. This does not, however, excuse older generations and families from engaging in the work, as each person in the community has a role in the accompaniment of young people.

The framework addresses ministries with several age groups. It should be noted that "youth" and "young adults" are indeed distinct age groups: *youth* are adolescents and teenagers in middle school and high school, while *young adults* are those in their late teens, twenties, and thirties in college and in the working world. While youth and young adults are chronologically adjacent to each other, outreach to these populations should not be fused together in ministerial practice.

What does connect them, though, are three factors: first, that all those from adolescence through young adulthood are going through periods of rapid developmental, emotional, and social

transitions that greatly impact their spiritual and personal growth; second, that in many instances, the Catholic Church has not invested as much as it should in faithfully accompanying them through times of great transition and growth; and third, that these generations have been among the most absent from the active practice of the Catholic faith in our nation's history.

As a result of these realities, the U.S. Bishops have decided to address, in one pastoral document, how the Church can best respond and accompany—institutionally as well as in homes, families, and social networks. As you read this framework, we pray that it will not just be another book on the shelf, but that it will serve as a nationwide summons to step up and engage youth and young adults in every local Catholic community and in every family.

Let us continue to pray for one another in this exciting task laid out before us.

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DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS

A Pastoral Letter from the U.S. Bishops to Youth and Young Adults

Dear young friends,

Christ is alive in you. We, the Catholic bishops of the United States of America, echo our Holy Father, Pope Francis, who reminds us, "He is in you, he is with you, and he never abandons you. However far you may wander, he is always there, the Risen One."[1] Wherever this letter finds you, we invite you to allow Jesus, the most important companion you will ever have on the journey of life, to transform you, so that Christ can always remain alive in you. That transformation begins with an encounter with Jesus, who is present for us and *listens* to our joys and struggles. He invites us to learn from him as he *teaches* us the truth, beauty, and goodness of the Gospel. Then we are transformed as Christ *sends* us forth on our mission to share what we received.

For our part, we – as your shepherds and companions on life's journey – have heard from you through the years, attentively listening to your stories. We have allowed your prophetic voices and enthusiastic zeal to touch our hearts and souls, and, with spiritual affection, we are grateful for your presence within our Catholic communities of faith. For those who are not connected to the Church: your presence is missed. You are always welcome, and, with us, we pray that you will find a loving and supportive home where Christ is truly present and ready to encounter you and touch your heart.

We have met many of you through the sacramental life of the Church, through Confirmation, Marriage, Baptism, or Holy Orders, and at various moments of return throughout the liturgical year. We pray that the graces you received from the Lord during those sacramental experiences have taken root in your lives. We have also met a number of young people through pilgrimages like World Youth Day. We have seen you at national and diocesan gatherings, events, and listening sessions[2]. Each of these encounters has been, for us, a source of great joy and hope.

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[1] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* (CV), 2019, no. 2.

[2] On a national level in recent years, these have included the USCCB Convocation of Catholic Leaders (2017), the Fifth National *Encuentro* (2017-2018), conversations leading to the XV Synod on Young People (2017-2019), the *National Dialogue* process (2017-2021), the USCCB *Journeying Together* initiative (2020-2023), and listening done to prepare for the XVI Synod on Synodality (2021-2024), as well as at National Catholic Youth Conferences (NCYC), Steubenville youth conferences, FOCUS SEEK conferences, and Catholic Social Ministries Gatherings (CSMG), among others.

In the Scriptures, the risen Christ meets and accompanies two disciples on the road to the town of Emmaus (see Lk 24:13-35), and this "journeying together"[3] is a fitting model for us to follow as we reflect on the Catholic Church's engagement and ministries with youth and young adults. In this story, we see as Jesus *listens* to their realities so that they might recognize what they are truly experiencing; he then *teaches* the disciples, causing them to interpret their lives in light of that teaching; finally, he speaks to their hearts and *sends* them out on mission, which they boldly choose to embark upon immediately.[4] We, too, are eager to listen to and understand your experiences, to teach and share the Catholic faith rooted in wisdom and a deep understanding of Christ and the Gospel by the Church, and to empower and send you forth into the world with hearts on fire for the Lord and his people.

This threefold path (*listen-teach-send*) is the framework that we are sharing with the leaders of the Catholic Church, so that, together, we might imitate Jesus Christ in accompanying you and your peers. We invite you to be receptive to the Church's engagement and ministries with young people, so that you, like those two disciples on the road, can also recognize Christ in your lives, interpret them in light of the Gospel, and choose to set forth on a lifelong path of missionary zeal and commitment.

God has always been at work in this way. The Scriptures and the story of the Church through the ages offer us many examples of the Lord speaking through the voices and actions of young people—biblical heroes such as the prophet Jeremiah, St. John the Apostle, and St. Timothy; courageous martyrs like St. Joan of Arc, St. Isidore Bakanja, and St. José Sánchez del Río; bold witnesses such as St. Pedro Calungsod, St. Kateri Tekakwitha, and St. Thérèse of Lisieux; and modern-day examples like Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati, Bl. Chiara Badano, Bl. Carlo Acutis, and so many more. The most prominent of these holy men and women is the Blessed Virgin Mary who said "yes" to the Lord as a young woman betrothed to Joseph (see Lk 1:38). They have all journeyed together with Christ in their own way, and we pray that you will follow the lead of these and countless other saints toward holiness and salvation.

[3] CV, no. 206.
[4] See CV, no. 237.

The purpose of the framework we offer to the Church is to empower the entire Catholic community to be conduits of the Holy Spirit in sharing the Gospel with all young people to transform the world by Jesus' love. As St. John Paul II once said, "Dear young friends: I pray that your faith in Christ will always be lively and strong. In this way, you will always be ready to tell others the reason for your hope; you will be messengers of hope for the world."[5] As your bishops, in the company of dedicated priests, deacons, lay, and consecrated leaders and your parents and families, we join you in this endeavor, as we seek to bring the light of Jesus to all people.

In *Christus Vivit,* Pope Francis' apostolic letter to and about young people, the Holy Father wrote, "Jesus, himself eternally young, wants to give us hearts that are ever young."[6] Though we are of different and older generations than you, we have all been invited to share in Christ's eternal youthfulness, which "means having a heart capable of loving, whereas everything that separates us from others makes the soul grow old."[7] Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6) for every age, every generation, and every culture. He is the path, the companion, and the destination of a pilgrimage on which we are all traveling together. He wants us all to have a conversion of heart.

At times, members of the Catholic community—and this includes us—have not always been attentive to the needs of young people and families. We recognize the pain and struggle many of you experience in your lives, communities, or the Church. For anything that we may have done or failed to do, individually or collectively, contributing to young people's distress, we humbly and sincerely ask for forgiveness, and we resolve to do what is "right and just" now and into the future.

We are also writing this in the wake of several difficult events over the past few years: scandals within the Church, a global pandemic, financial difficulties that have impacted you and the Church's ministries for you, the breakdown of the family, an increase in acts of racism and prejudice, the rise of polarization, secularism, and individualism, and a growing awareness that many of you do not feel valued, listened to, or loved. On our part, we resolve to continue working with you and all of the Church to bring healing, reconciliation, and the peace of Jesus Christ.

[5] John Paul II, "Teleconference with Young People," Apostolic Journey to the United States of America and Canada, Universal Amphitheatre (Los Angeles, CA), September 15, 1987, no. 3.
[6] CV, no. 13.
[7] Ibid.

This national pastoral framework is being given to the Church as a step toward more substantial conversations and Spirit-led renewal in our ministries to, with, and for you. We hope and pray that all the young people of our country, in particular those who are suffering, lost, or alone, "feel the closeness of a Catholic community that can reflect Jesus' words by our actions, our embrace, and our concrete help."[8] Please know that you are constantly in our hearts and we, as servant leaders within the Church, want to journey together with you so that "we can learn from one another, warm hearts, inspire minds with the light of the Gospel, and lend new strength to our hands."[9]

In that spirit, we join Pope Francis in speaking directly to you as he did in *Christus Vivit* and as he does at World Youth Days and in other encounters and addresses. To begin, we wish to reiterate that God is always with you. Do not lose hope! There are reasons the Lord put you on your path in life. Do not lose faith when bad things happen and do not abandon hope if you have strayed from a good and moral path. You are holy and precious in the eyes of Christ: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1 Cor 6:19). Do not feel you are unlovable or unforgiveable.

In fact, you are so significant and worthy of love "for you are the work of his hands."[10] You are infinitely loved! You belong. You have a purpose. You matter. To God, to the Church, to us, to your peers, and to the world, you truly matter. Know of God's boundless mercy and seek out opportunities for reconciliation. Christ pursues us, no matter how far we might stray from him, because he loves us. You are never too far away, and you always have a home in the Lord's house, where you can encounter Jesus' redeeming mercy.

Make time to read Scripture, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the lives of the saints, who inspire us by their timeless witness of faith. Read and reflect on *Christus Vivit* and hear Pope Francis speak directly to your heart. Persevere in the Christian faith. Be an active part of the Catholic community. Be protagonists of love and hope "and make good decisions"[11] in your daily

[8] CV, no. 77
[9] CV, no. 199
[10] CV, no. 115.
[11] CV, no. 143.

life. Pray often. Slow down and allow God to speak to you in a still, small "whispering sound" (1 Kgs 19:12). Serve those in need. Consider where God is calling you in life "to share in his work of creation and to contribute to the common good by using the gifts we have received."[12] Go and "make a ruckus!"[13]

As we said at the beginning of this letter, Christ is indeed alive in you. This is why "there can be no doubt that goodness will have the upper hand in your life… If we hold fast to him, we will have life, and be protected from the threats of death and violence that may assail us in life."[14] We share this fervent hope with you. Have the courage to accept these challenges: being open to a conversion of heart to the way of Jesus; becoming a missionary disciple on fire with the faith; bearing witness to Christ and sharing the Gospel with your peers; and freely giving your life to the Lord and for others.

For our part, we commit to praying for you and your well-being. We join you in prayer for the world, especially those on the peripheries who suffer greatly. We humbly ask you to pray for us, your bishops and pastors. The power of prayer is incredible. May we each pray for one another and for all our intentions. We especially look forward to praying alongside you when we have the honor of encountering each other in the sacred liturgy of the Church and sharing the Eucharist. We also commit to supporting you in your boldness as missionary disciples and to help you seek God's truth, beauty, and goodness in the world, even if your peers may not support it. Pope Francis wrote, "Don't think that this mission is soft and easy… don't wait until tomorrow to contribute your energy, your audacity, and your creativity to changing our world... You are the *now* of God, and he wants you to bear fruit."[15]

We commit to *listening* to you as, together, we discern what the Holy Spirit says to us through Scripture and Tradition, being attentive to the courageous words you share with the Church.

[12] CV, no. 253.
[13] CV, no. 143.
[14] CV, no. 127.
[15] CV, no. 178.

We commit to *teaching* you, ever watchful for the "signs of the times" (Mt 16:3),[16] yet always faithful to Christ and his truth. We endeavor to share the Gospel by the witness of our lives and actions.

We commit to *sending* you, accompanying, investing in, and equipping you for the vocation and mission God has called you to in this life so that you might be loving agents of transformation.

Working together, let us all—bishops, ministry leaders, and young people, in the company of your pastors, families, and local communities—fervently commit to carrying out Christ's mission in the world, in solidarity and in collaboration with each other, always guided by the Holy Spirit. Let us renew our mutual call to be missionary disciples who love the Lord and seek to do his will. Let us walk side by side with one another on this shared pilgrimage, "keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith" (Heb 12:2), with the maternal protection of our Blessed Mother Mary, the young woman of Nazareth, to whom we entrust the Church's ministries to, with, and for you.

[16] See also John XXIII, Apostolic Constitution *Humanae Salutis* (HS), 1961, no. 4.

FRAMEWORK INTRODUCTION

Jesus himself drew near and walked with them. (Lk 24:15)

Christ is alive[17] in the youth and young adults of the United States,[18] as well as in the hearts of those who accompany them. Christ draws near to young people in order to *listen* to them, *teach* them, and *send* them forth, filled with the Holy Spirit to "be protagonists of the revolution of charity and service."[19] The Catholic Church is called to imitate Christ as she encounters and engages each new generation: to listen, teach, and send every young person in the name of Jesus.

In this, the Church renews her commitment to accompany and minister with youth and young adults. Effective ministries with young people must be dynamic movements inspired by the Holy Spirit, where all generations, cultures, and communities "journey together,"[20] advancing toward "experiencing a shared encounter with the living God."[21]

We, as the Catholic bishops of the United States, offer this national pastoral framework as a summons to local faith communities across the country to renew their efforts with youth and young adults. This particular revitalization began with the Holy Father, who convened an international synod on young people[22] from 2017 to 2018 and subsequently encouraged the entire Church through his apostolic exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, in 2019. We echo his words in that wonderful teaching, and now wish to address our pastors and our lay, ordained, and consecrated Catholic leaders, including parents and families, so that the Church might experience a rejuvenation of evangelization to and ministries with youth and young adults. In global synod consultations, the People of God raised up the need for "a renewed focus on young people, their formation" and that "accompaniment (of the young) is an urgent need"[23] for dioceses/eparchies, parishes, campuses,

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[17] Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit* (CV) (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2019), no. 1-2.
[18] In this document, the term "youth" connotes adolescents in their teenage years, while the term "young adults" is defined as women and men in their twenties and thirties, single and married, with or without children.
[19] CV, no. 174.
[20] CV, no. 199.
[21] CV, no. 204.
[22] It is helpful for those from the United States to know there are English linguistic differences that exist in Vatican and other countries' documents and activities around "young people." For example, when Pope Francis references "youth" or "youth ministry" in *Christus Vivit*, it inclusively applies to adolescents, collegians, *and* "young adults," as it is translated from either "giovani" (Italian) or "jovenes" (Spanish), a broader age range than the U.S. concept of "youth" (which is often limited to the teenage years, whereas elsewhere, it may refer to those ages 16 to 35).
[23] Vatican Synod Office, *Working Document for the Continental Stage*, XVI Ordinary Synod, Sept. 2022, no. 35.

movements, and apostolates. We recommit ourselves to this important effort, so that this moment "may be an opportune time for courageous spiritual renewal"[24] for the Church and our approach to young people. As we look at culture and the realities impacting the U.S., we feel this is the time for us to offer an urgent, prophetic, and pastoral response to ensure the Gospel is preached to younger generations and that the important work of ministry and accompaniment of youth and young adults be carried out faithfully and effectively in every Catholic community throughout our nation.

The overarching narrative for this message of renewal is grounded in the journey of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus with the risen Lord found in the Scriptures (Lk 24:13-35). In *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis recommends the Emmaus story as "a model for what happens"[25] in ministries with youth and young adults, as it points to "a process that is gradual, respectful, patient, hopeful, tireless, and compassionate"[26] and it always begins with the Lord:

> Jesus walks with two disciples who did not grasp the meaning of all that happened to him and are leaving Jerusalem and the community behind. Wanting to accompany them, he joins them on the way. He asks them questions and listens patiently to their version of events, and in this way, he helps them *recognize* what they were experiencing. Then, with affection and power, he proclaims the word to them, leading them to *interpret* the events they had experienced in the light of the Scriptures. He accepts their invitation to stay with them as evening falls; he enters into their night. As they listen to him speak, their hearts burn within them and their minds are opened; they then recognize him in the breaking of the bread. They themselves *choose* to resume their journey at once in the opposite direction, to return to the community and to share the experience of their encounter with the risen Lord.[27]

This threefold framework shows how a young person can *recognize* God at work in their lives, *interpret* their experiences in light of faith, and, as a result, discover and *choose* to follow their vocation and mission. A transformation, or *metanoia*,[28] can take place because Jesus first listens,

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[24] John Paul II, "Message of the Holy Father to the youth of the world on the occasion of the 15th World Youth Day" (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana [LEV], June 29, 1999), no. 4.
[25] CV, no. 236.
[26] CV, no. 236.
[27] CV, no. 237.
[28] "*metanoeín*… To go beyond our usual ways of thinking, beyond our habitual worldview," Pope Francis, Homily, Athens (December 5, 2021). Also important is the word "conversion" that is essential to effective ministry.

teaches, and sends them. The Church, following Christ's example, is called to do the same: to *listen* to young people, to *teach* them the Gospel, and to *send* them forth into the world, alive in the Spirit. This "listen-teach-send" triptych is a framework to further develop concrete ministerial plans. Just as "Jesus himself drew near and walked with them…while they were conversing and debating" (Lk 24:15), Christ draws near to us once more, as we ourselves continue to converse and discern the best practices and latest trends about young people. His constant and eternal presence, made manifest in the Word of God and the Eucharist, ceaselessly aids us as we embark upon a journey in the company of the young, with hopeful hearts. The Holy Spirit, the divine protagonist active in our world today, strengthens and moves us toward the Church's preeminent mission of evangelization, offering us motivation to move forward in hope.

So that this framework is not a theoretical ideal or the property of a select few professional ministers, we begin this summons in the home and with our loved ones, for "the family should be the first place of accompaniment."[29] The Church's pastoral ministries with youth, collegians, and young adults must be deliberate not only in partnering with parents, families, and family ministries, but truly integrating our work together "with the aim of ensuring a continuous and suitable accompaniment of the vocational process."[30] All of this is best done by starting with a simple encounter with one or a few youth or young adults within our families, social networks, or parishes, with a movement toward authentic listening, evangelization, and mission.[31]

When speaking about "young people" in this framework, we are not imagining an abstract concept, group, or a data demographic; rather we have in mind the young women and men who we know or with whom we interact on a regular basis: sons and daughters, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, siblings, and cousins within our families, as well as friends, colleagues, co-workers, neighbors, and all the young people we meet in our daily routines. Each of them has a unique name, face, and identity: beloved by God and integral to the mission of the Church. Just as Jesus drew near to the disciples on the road, may we also draw near to them and, in imitation of Christ and by the grace of God, faithfully listen, teach, and send them forth on the journey ahead.

[29] CV, no. 242.
[30] CV, no. 242.
[31] Additional suggestions and concrete ideas for implementation can also be found in the supplemental materials accompanying this document, prepared by the USCCB Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth.

PART 1: LISTENING

(Jesus) asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" (Lk 24:17)

Jesus began the Emmaus journey with the disciples in a posture of listening and asking questions like "What are you discussing as you walk along?" (Lk 24:17). Modeling the Church's ministries with young people on this open and inquisitive example, the place to begin engaging with any youth or young adult is through intentional and patient listening and dialogue, with the goal of helping a young person recognize God at work in their lives and stories. Christ always listens to us, and the Church should always listen to youth and young adults.

Let us ask young people regularly: What's on your mind? What's on your heart? What's bothering you? What's exciting for you? What are you dreaming about? For what are you hoping? Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, those we encounter may be walking in the wrong direction. They may say or do things with which we disagree. But, like Jesus, we are called to listen with love, tenderness, and compassion. God seeks us and takes the initiative to claim us as his own, no matter how far or how fast we might walk away from him. Following the Lord's lead, the Church is asked to do the same, especially with youth and young adults.

This posture, then, involves a meaningful encounter with, a steadfast presence among, and an authentic desire to know and understand youth and young adults in the realities of their lives. Once we have truly listened, trust can be formed, and we can go even deeper. As Pope Francis noted, "We need to make more room for the voices of young people to be heard: listening makes possible an exchange of gifts in a context of empathy… it sets the conditions for a preaching of the Gospel that can touch the heart truly, decisively, and fruitfully."[32]

Youth and young adults have made their voices known to the bishops nationally and pastors locally through the Church's ongoing listening and consultation processes.[33] Many young people have

[32] CV, no. 38. (quoting FD, no. 1).

[33] These listening experiences include, but are not limited to: the XV Ordinary Synod on "Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment" (Vatican, 2017-2018); the Fifth National *Encuentro* on Hispanic/Latino Ministry in the United States (USCCB, 2017-2018); the *National Dialogue on Catholic Pastoral Ministries with Youth and Young Adults* (NFCYM, LaRED, CCMA, NATYAM, and USCCB, 2017-2021); *Journeying Together: A National Catholic Intercultural Encounter for Ministries with Youth and Young Adults* (USCCB, 2019-2023); and the XVI Ordinary Synod "For a Synodal Church" (Vatican, 2021-2024).

shared that they love Jesus, his Church, and the People of God. They bring enthusiasm and creative ideas to the various ministries in which they participate. At the same time, the Church recognizes that there are many youth and young adults who are no longer connected to or active within our Catholic communities. Some do not hear or respond to the Lord's call in their lives, while others have been hurt or ignored in their families and by church leaders, contributing to this distance.

Over the past number of years, we have seen a significant statistical rise in the number of people who no longer identify with any religious tradition or faith community (often called the "nones"). This detachment can begin as early as pre-adolescence.[34] We can become disheartened as we see junior high and high school youth who no longer engage in their faith after Confirmation. We are also saddened as fewer young adults pursue marriage in the Church, priesthood, or consecrated life, seek Baptism for their sons and daughters, or raise their children in the Catholic faith.

The family, especially the witness of the parents, plays a major role in this pattern. "Believing parents, with their daily example of life, have the most effective capacity to transmit the beauty of the Christian faith to their children."[35] We are encouraged when we see youth and young adults in the company of their families at liturgical and cultural celebrations and during moments of return like holidays, weddings, or funerals, and when parents and guardians pass on a love of the Word of God, the joy of volunteering in the community, the tradition of Catholic devotions, regular engagement in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and a belief and participation in the Holy Eucharist. We are deeply concerned, however, with an increasing absence of parents and families as the "first catechists" of their children (along with the general breakdown of family structures to support young people as they develop), as well as a lack of collaboration between family ministries and ministries with youth and young adults, which has visible impact on the declining faith practices in young people.[36] We recognize the critical importance of parents and grandparents for the transmission of faith from one generation to the next and for the encouragement of vocations, and pray that there might be a better coordination between these ministries to revitalize such efforts.

[34] Bob McCarty and John Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2018), p. 42.
[35] Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis (DFC)*, (Vatican City State: LEV, 2020) no. 124.
[36] See USCCB, *Called to the Joy of Love* (2022) for more on the pastoral care of marriages and families.

These factors all contribute to the context in which we often find ourselves, as we set out on this journey together.

Encountering Young People

The first step in listening is to draw closer to young people: not just to talk *about* them, but also to talk *with* them. When we encounter young people, we see their faces, hear their voices, and allow their words and actions to move us. We come to know who they are. We learn their stories. This also means we go out of our own comfort zones to encounter those of another generation: meeting youth and young adults on their paths—especially outside church walls—just as Jesus did when he caught up with the two disciples walking away from Jerusalem. As Pope Francis tells us, "There is room for everyone. Jesus says this clearly… young and old, healthy and infirm, righteous and sinners. Everyone, everyone, everyone! In the Church, there is room for everyone."[37] When we encounter the great diversity of young people where they live and move and have their being (see Acts 17:28), we have an opportunity to encounter the Lord, present in all their hearts. We meet Christ suffering through their struggles, and we see Christ joyous through their youthfulness and energy.

In our own recent encounters with youth and young adults, we have come to understand that the sobering trends in culture and society can be caused, magnified, or aggravated by the realities surrounding young people. This includes increasing secularization; worldwide health concerns; wars and international conflict; financial challenges; racial and cultural divisions; divorce and the breakdown of the family; challenges to the beauty of human sexuality; the rise of mobile technology and the prevalence of social media (and its impact on mental health and wellness); environmental concerns; growing rates of poverty and economic disparity; political and social polarization; migration, refugee, and immigration issues; the pervasive culture of relativism and judgmentalism; and the sexual abuse crises in society and in the Church herself.[38] Distinct to our times, we also

[37] Francis, "Welcome Ceremony Address of His Holiness" (Parque Eduardo VII, Lisbon), 2023.
[38] See input from the *National Dialogue on Catholic Pastoral Ministry with Youth and Young Adults* Final Report (2021) at https://nationaldialogue.info/ and the USCCB *Journeying Together* project (2020-2023) at https://www.usccb.org/committees/cultural-diversity-church/journeying-together, among others.

recognize the significant impact that random and unpredictable acts of public violence are having on young people today.

Pope Francis lamented that, "at times, the hurt felt by some young people is heart-rending, a pain too deep for words."[39] We are especially grieved when we encounter young people struggling with mental health crises, exacerbated by grief, anxiety, loneliness and isolation, uncertainty of their societal context, and technology. We are struck by the racial injustices toward Black and African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Hispanics/Latinos, and Native Americans. It shows us that this country and the Catholic Church still struggle with the evil of racism.

Young people with disabilities have also shared with us that they feel marginalized and unnoticed in society, among their peers, and even within faith communities. And many youth and young adults have become accustomed to horrific events such as suicides, shootings, and incidents of violence within schools, campuses, neighborhoods, and workplaces. At the same time, we see how young people come together in response to these and other tragic situations, providing hopeful witness to God's goodness in the face of adversity. This is further exacerbated by economic difficulties in our Catholic communities, which have caused many dioceses/eparchies, campuses, parishes, and apostolates to combine, reduce, or eliminate positions and ministry initiatives supporting young people, leaving them without opportunities for pastoral care during challenging times.

Yet we "abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:13). We are encouraged by local ministries across the United States that regularly encounter young people, especially those in marginalized communities that seek to heal wounds and renew youth or young adults in the faith.[40] Their example shows us that, to truly enter into this journey with any young person, we must be willing to encounter that individual with loving and generous pastoral concern, wherever they are, and prayerfully reflect on the situations they face: Who do we see before us? Who is missing? What are all their concerns? And then: How can we respond?

[39] CV, no. 77.

[40] We commend ministries such as *Corazon Puro* in the Bronx in the Archdiocese of New York, led by the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, and *Iskali*, a leadership development ministry in the Archdiocese of Chicago, led by lay Catholic young people, among other local apostolates and parish ministries, for their work at encountering young people in challenging circumstances and within marginalized communities.

Being Fully Present

Christ is fully present in our Church and in our world. For two millennia, the Lord has remained in our midst: through his Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist, in Word and Sacrament, and as he reminded us in Scripture, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20).

We share that constant and loving presence of the Lord by providing empathetic presence and accompaniment in helping youth and young adults navigate numerous life transitions and developmental moments. God shares his presence to and with young people by acting through us: when we accompany and are fully present to a young person, he or she can feel the presence of Christ, who longs to be close to every individual we encounter. There are times when silence and simply being present—proceeding without judgement or "fixing"—is a great course of action "in imitation of Jesus' care of people, especially those who were hurting and in need." [41]

For youth moving from junior high to and through high school as they develop physically, creatively, intellectually, and spiritually, this practically means that the Church is there to help them, in conjunction with their families, as they navigate through friendship, intimacy, life goals, and vocational pathways. For those in their 20s or 30s, it is being present as they discern and engage in young adult life transitions. As they enter and graduate from college, seek employment, or engage in military service; as they move away from home, form relationships (dating, engaged, or married); as they start a family or become a priest, consecrated religious sister, or brother; and as they assume responsibility for the concrete realities of life (from housing, bills, and taxes to healthcare and caring for aging parents), the Church is called to be lovingly there for them.

Both youth and young adults need the presence of Christ and the Church when facing challenges due to immigration status, unemployment, incarceration and criminal record, poverty, lack of educational opportunities, domestic abuse, separation, divorce, broken families, disability, and other realities. These experiences can lead to or may be compounded by loneliness, social isolation, anxiety, stress, insecurity, or clinical depression, including serious consideration of or committing

[41] USCCB, *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (1997), p. 42.

suicide. Young people are particularly vulnerable in these contexts and need the care and support of faith communities. The Church, through its social and support ministries such as Catholic Charities, Catholic Relief Services, Walking with Moms in Need, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, addiction recovery programs, and other local efforts with vulnerable populations, can remind young people who are marginalized and at risk of the presence and pastoral care of a God who loves them unconditionally.

We have also seen positive signs of the Holy Spirit at work, where the Church is truly present in the lives of the young. The rise of lay movements, associations, and new communities, Catholic scouting, and pilgrimages to World Youth Day are all having a positive impact on many young people. There are also parishes and dioceses/eparchies engaging in creative projects for active churchgoers and ecumenical collaboration. Catholic campus ministries and evangelical missionaries provide collegians with loving accompaniment, vibrant liturgies, retreats, and meaningful encounters of service in university settings. Intercultural and social justice efforts, including volunteer, advocacy, and immersion programs, offer young people opportunities to work together in the Church's mission to the margins. Many faith communities have embraced new technologies and invited young people to assist them in understanding and making use of the digital landscape. And more young people are encountering Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, the Real Presence, both in Mass and in Eucharistic adoration.

Understanding Across Generations

As the Church encounters, listens to, and is present to young people, she comes to better understand the uniqueness of each person. Pope Francis noted that in the world today, "we see a tendency to 'homogenize' young people, blurring what is distinctive about their origins and backgrounds, and turning them into a line of malleable goods"[42] producing a cultural sterility wherein identities are often forgotten over time. It should go without saying that youth and young adults are not a data set, a demographic category, or an abstract monolith; rather every young person has a name, a face, and a soul, "each with the reality of his or her own life."[43] To truly understand and appreciate each

[42] CV, no. 186.
[43] CV, no. 71.

unique story, we must recognize the distinct cultural and generational expressions present in their lives. We listen to understand with loving hearts.

Though knowing data, cultural norms, and emerging trends about youth, collegians, or young adults can be helpful to some degree, we discover that the best way to get to know the young is through individual accompaniment. Pope Francis emphasizes this as he reflects on the story of Emmaus, noting that, as Jesus did with the two disciples on the road, listening must be "directed to the individual" and that "the other person must sense that I am listening unconditionally, without being offended or shocked, tired or bored… Attentive and selfless listening is a sign of our respect for others, whatever their ideas or their choices in life."[44] One must listen in order to understand the other—to walk in their shoes along the journey of life.

St. John Bosco, a nineteenth-century Italian priest and educator, set an example for the Church in this regard. One who follows in this saint's footsteps actively "participates in the life of young people, takes an interest in their problems, tries to realize how they see things, takes part in their sporting and cultural activities, (and) in their conversations."[45] As church leaders, parents, and trusted adults learn more about each youth or young adult in their lives, they begin to learn about and better understand the young person's unique culture, generation, and lived experiences, thus making them a more effective and responsive pastoral minister to and with the young. This also applies to young peer ministers who are challenged to learn about and engage with youth and young adults outside their immediate network of friends or colleagues.

Healing Brokenness

Young people cannot always hear the voice of the Lord if their basic needs are not being met or when there is a brokenness that eclipses their engagement with a faith community. "Indeed, the situation often demands that the apostolate amongst young people be an animation of a missionary or humanitarian nature, as a necessary first step."[46] The Church, then, is compelled to take a more *pastoral* approach in its ministries with youth, collegians, and young adults.

[44] CV, no 292.
[45] John Paul II, Letter *Iuvenum Patris* (on the centenary of the death of St. John Bosco), 1988, no. 12.
[46] Vatican Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) (Vatican City: LEV, 1997), no. 185.

As part of the listening process, we can be a "field hospital after battle" to "heal the wounds"[47] of the many young people who struggle, in great and in small ways, and address the brokenness in those youth and young adults who are indifferent to the faith or seek greater meaning in their lives. The Church's ministries with youth and young adults need to be attentive to the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of young people, so that God's grace can break through any hardness of hearts or calcified wounds. Pastoral leaders and families are encouraged to advocate for and assist youth and young adults, especially those at risk and living on the margins of society. This involves a willingness to engage in the pastoral work of healing brokenness, restoring trust, and rejuvenating faith. It calls for an evangelization (and, as needed, a pre-evangelization experience) that engages both the heart and the head of a young person.

Trust must be curated in order for deeper formation or the pursuit of a vocational pathway to take root in a young person's life—and that can take time. We recognize the times we have failed the faithful, in particular through scandals and abuses of power, and pledge to do what is right and just. In this, we can seek to rebuild that trust. Furthermore, good ministry with the young cannot be rushed. At the same time, however, it cannot be delayed. This patient, yet urgent, directive speaks to the development of a more synodal model of ministry with young people,[48] which is a "journeying together" toward co-responsibility and "the participation of all in the life of the Church."[49] The Catholic community, in its "progress in building a people in peace, justice, and fraternity,"[50] recognizes that "time is greater than space… unity is greater than conflict… realities are greater than ideas… (and) the whole is greater than the part."[51] The entire process of listening to and with young people, especially in healing and restoring what was broken, takes time and patience, remains free from judgement and conflict, and is grounded in lived realities.

In a culturally diverse country like the United States, pastoral ministers with the young are to become interculturally and intergenerationally competent as "knowledge, attitudes, and skills in intercultural and interracial relations are indispensable requirements for engaging in the Church's

[47] "Interview with Pope Francis," by Fr. Antonio Spadaro, S.J., *La Civiltà Cattolica*, September 21, 2013.
[48] CV, no. 206.
[49] Synod of Bishops, *Preparatory Document for the Synod "For a Synodal Church"* (Vatican City: LEV, 2021), no. 11.
[50] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2013), no. 221.
[51] Ibid, nos. 222, 228, 233, 235.

evangelizing mission."[52] In listening to the hurts, realities, questions, frustrations, and the malaise of youth and young adults, we have an opportunity to restore an authentic "culture of encounter"[53] which also includes taking "responsibility for correcting the injustices of racism and healing the harms it has caused… and to express our strong and renewed resolve to work for justice."[54] These healing acts are essential to a Church that truly listens to the young.

From Listening to Response

When ministry leaders and families truly listen, they often encounter "those who are poor" and they critique social systems that inhibit the fulfillment of the Reign of God,"[55] and can establish truly responsive and dynamic ministries that are multilingual, intercultural, and intergenerational, with "greater hospitality and outreach, collaboration and mutual respect among the movements, bridges to social services in the community, meeting people on the peripheries and attending to the needs of the most vulnerable."[56] With this in mind, listening should always lead to a response that is rooted in what was heard and seen, as well as unique, as every young person is distinct. Such response is done within a "community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach"[57]

Continued effort can be made to equip all faithful Catholics with a responsive spirit, always being mindful of those who may feel excluded, ostracized, or overlooked.[58] To support priests and parish leaders, who are themselves overwhelmed with increasing responsibility and limited resources, the entire Catholic community will need to step in and work to transform their local parishes into "environments of living communion and participation."[59] In doing this they can, together, "make all

[52] USCCB, *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers: Bilingual* (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2014), xiii.
[53] EG, no. 220.
[54] USCCB, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love – A Pastoral Letter Against Racism* (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2018), p. 23-24.
[55] USCCB, *Encountering Christ in Harmony: A Pastoral Response to our Asian and Pacific Island Brothers and Sisters* (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2018), p. 41.
[56] *Proceedings and Conclusions*, English section, p. 43. This sentiment was also echoed within the USCCB *Journeying Together* process and conclusions.
[57] EG, no. 28.
[58] The USCCB Building Intercultural Competence for Ministry (BICM) initiatives and the resource, *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers* (USCCB Publications, 2014) from the Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church, can be helpful in this regard. See https://www.usccb.org/committees/cultural-diversity-church/intercultural-competencies.
[59] EG, no. 28.

our institutions better equipped to be more welcoming to young people… (to) offer possibilities for experiencing openness and love, affirmation, and growth."[60]

This communion finds its high point in the celebration of the Eucharist, "the participation of the People of God in the work of God."[61] In the many transitions that young people face, they should be able to find a "home" wherever Mass is celebrated. "The Sacrament of the Eucharist is called Holy Communion precisely because, by placing us in intimate communion with the sacrifice of Christ, we are placed in intimate communion with him and, through him, with each other."[62] By pointing young people toward the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and inviting them to active participation in a Eucharistic community, we offer young people an encounter with the Lord who is always present, mercifully understanding, and the source of all healing. Therefore, efforts to encourage the participation of youth and young adults in the Eucharistic celebration and in Eucharistic devotions can root young people in their Catholic identity and can give them tools to reach out "beyond their small groups and to build 'social friendship, where everyone works for the common good.'"[63] Through this, young people may also find connection with the global Catholic Church. Experiences like national conferences, volunteer immersion and justice experiences, regional networking, and World Youth Days offer youth, collegians, and young adults a glimpse of the universal community of the faith, a worldwide "home" as it were, while also enhancing the journey of a young person within their own local community, their cultural and ethnic heritage, and their family of origin.

Despite the struggles that the disciples on the road to Emmaus had just endured in witnessing the passion and death of the Lord, the divine stranger who joined them allowed the two travelers to share their stories in their fullness—without interruption or judgement. In so doing, Jesus fostered a sense of belonging and community as they journeyed together. They felt at ease in the Lord's presence. That all began with Jesus' posture of pastoral listening, even if what they were sharing was incomplete. This is the first step for the Church's work with youth and young adults today. Ministries with the young can be best understood as a "response of the Christian community to the

[60] CV, no. 216.
[61] CCC, no. 1069.
[62] USCCB, *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church* (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2021), no. 25.
[63] CV, no. 169.

needs of young people, and the sharing of the unique gifts of youth with the larger community."[64] In this, we encourage ministry leaders and families to establish conditions for mutual listening to take place: where older generations can truly listen to the young and where the young can truly listen to God speaking to them in the Word and the wisdom of the Church. This listening also leads to vocation: as we listen, we can help young people identify, discern, and put their gifts in the service of the Church or for their mission in the world. When we are open and moved by what we hear, and when others know that we have understood them and have restored that which had been lost, our hearts and minds are more receptive to the call of the Lord.

[64] National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), *A Vision of Youth Ministry*. (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 1976), p. 6.

PART 2: TEACHING

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, (Jesus) interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures. (Lk 24:27)

Having patiently listened to the testimony of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus makes an abrupt intervention: "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!" (Lk 24:25) This was not meant to embarrass or hurt his traveling companions, but to catch their attention as he broke their darkness with the truth of his radiant light. Jesus offers his disciples an opportunity to have a conversion of the heart. He is now going to teach them in a decisive way, to respond and reveal himself in their experiences, and in so doing, give them "a new spirit," transforming their hearts from stone to new life (see Ez. 36:26).

Jesus was called "Rabbi" or "Teacher" (Jn 1:38) and shared the Good News through dialogue, parables, and teachings. He interpreted the Scriptures and applied their wisdom to present circumstances. In each successive generation, all who have ministered in the Lord's name have been instructed by Christ to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Mt 28:19) The Great Commission continues to this day within the Church's ministries with youth and young adults, as pastoral leaders, families, and young people share the light of Christ and bring about a conversion of heart. This begins by responding to their realities.

Here we recall St. Kateri Tekakwitha, a young indigenous woman of the Algonquin and Iroquois nations living in the seventeenth century, persecuted for her faith in Christ and raised up as a model for today's young people by Pope Francis.[65] St. Kateri found the solace of the Lord through her teachers and guides, the Jesuit missionaries of North America. Longing to know more about the Catholic faith, she asked of those who ministered with her: "Who will teach me what is most pleasing to God, that I may do it?"[66] Her teachers and pastors invited her to know Christ, proclaimed the Good News, formed her in the teachings of the Church, baptized her, and fed her with the Bread of Life, to sustain and strengthen her. We are called to do the same.

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[65] See CV, no. 55.

[66] Kateri Tekakwitha, qtd. in Walworth, Ellen Hardin, *The Life and Times of Kateri Tekakwitha: The Lily of the Mohawks, 1656-1680* (Buffalo, New York: Peter Paul & Brother, 1893), p. 196.

This speaks to the role of mentors and guides in a young person's life. "Mentors should not lead young people as passive followers, but walk alongside them, allowing them to be active participants in the journey… A mentor should therefore nurture the seeds of faith in young people, without expecting to immediately see the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit."[67] Too many youth and young adults today lack mentors in their lives, and yet these wisdom figures can do so much to guide a young person along the right path. This experience of accompaniment is something that begins in the family and extends to the teachers, respected adults, church leaders, and professional connections that a young person encounters as he or she matures through life.

Proclaiming Jesus Christ

What does Jesus teach the disciples on the way to Emmaus? The evangelist tells us that, "beginning with Moses and the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures" (Lk 24:27). This reminds us that the proclamation of *Christ* must be at the center of any experience of engaging youth and young adults. Jesus is at the core of evangelization.

St. Paul VI shared that "to everyone I proclaim him… Jesus Christ is our constant preaching; it is his name that we proclaim to the ends of the earth (see Rom 10:18) and throughout all ages (see Rom 9:5). Remember this and ponder on it!"[68] When we preach Jesus Christ and the Gospel in their fullness, it can light a fire of faith in those who hear it proclaimed with love and passion.

Pastoral leaders and families who share the life and teaching of Jesus "are called to love and accept all people in a way that invites each person to a deeper relationship with Christ and a greater alignment of their lives with his teachings."[69] Youth and young adults will be able to encounter Christ through the Church, the sacraments, and the witness of our lives. Making a bold invitation of faith can help dispel the darkness and amplify the joys in a young person's life, allowing Jesus Christ to transform his or her lived experiences and bring about a conversion of the heart.

[67] CV, no. 246.
[68] Paul VI, "Homily of the Holy Father, Mass at Quezon Circle, Manila, Philippines" (LEV: November 29, 1970), no. 1.
[69] USCCB, *Living as Missionary Disciples* (LMD) (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2017), p. 15.

The teachings of Christ are countercultural and transformative: seeking God's Kingdom first above all, loving enemies, living a moral life, and sacrificing one's own self for the good of others, especially those who are marginalized and forgotten. It may take time to embrace these truths, and young people should be given loving environments where they can ask questions without judgment and wrestle with difficult issues. As young people are accompanied on a pilgrimage of faith, they need to hear a clear proclamation of the message of salvation, the implications of Gospel living (including the effects of sin), the embrace of God's mercy, and the unconditional love that Christ offers those who follow him—all inculturated in their lives in a language and style they can understand, appreciate, and appropriate within their own lives. They need faith-filled parents, pastoral ministers, and peer leaders who can lovingly interpret young people's stories through the lens of faith and foster a conversion of the heart. In particular, for those in ordained ministry, we cannot stress enough the importance that a homily, by articulating well the relevant meaning of the Word of God, has on engaging young people in the liturgical life of the Church and inviting them into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

"All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the *kerygma*."[70] This is not the mere recitation of a formula, but a process by which one, through experience and explanation, can understand the love of God as shown through Jesus Christ. Embracing this love not only draws one closer to God, but also toward others. "The *kerygma* has a clear social content: at the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others. The content of the first proclamation has an immediate moral implication centered on charity."[71]

Effective teachers should be familiar with the Bible, both the Old and New Testament, and the Church's teaching concerning the Word of God which includes both Scripture and Tradition, understanding the story of salvation as revealed through the sacred texts. A young person learns of God and his love for us through Scripture, "the speech of God as it is put down in writing," and through Sacred Tradition, which "transmits in its entirety the Word of God."[72] The Gospels have a "special preeminence"[73] among all the Scriptures, since "they are the principal witness of the life

[70] EG, no. 165.
[71] EG, no. 177.
[72] CCC, no 81.
[73] Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, no. 18.

and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior."[74] The Gospels should likewise be preeminent in the lives of all missionary disciples. God continues to reveal himself in different ways through the Church and the truths presented in Scripture, sacraments, Tradition, the saints and doctors of the Church, and Catholic social teaching, as well as in symbols, rituals, sacramentals, and devotions.

One cannot separate the doctrine and moral teaching of the Church from the proclamation of Jesus Christ. There is no opposition between what the Church teaches and what God has revealed. The Church is the means by which we can hear Jesus' voice (see Jn 10:27), experience his saving power, have a conversion of heart, and be drawn into the community of faith. When a young person has a real encounter with Jesus Christ, like those disciples on the road to Emmaus, their hearts will burn within them, compelling them to want to know the Lord even more.

Another key component of this evangelization is for families and pastoral leaders to share their own witness to the saving power of God in their lives. To tell our story, with its joys and challenges, is to open ourselves up to another companion on the journey, freely admitting our faults and stumbles along the way, in order to show a young person how Christ illuminated the path for us. Authentic storytelling invites the other person to see how God works in the everyday experiences of life and to consider how to discover the Lord in their story. In this process, he or she is able to better interpret, with the support of caring companions, how God is at work. For those who are tepid in their faith lives or indifferent to the Church and her teachings, this renewed understanding of the power of one's story can convert hearts and minds toward further formation and mission.

An Evangelizing Catechesis

In healthy and loving relationships, one continually grows in knowledge of the other. The same principle applies to a young person's relationship with God and the Church. The ministry of formation flows from the *kerygma* and is an essential part of ministries with youth, collegians, and young adults, as it trains one for a life of discipleship, the aim of which is "intimacy with Christ."[75] The knowledge shared within the catechetical journey is given to help one fall more deeply in love

[74] Ibid, no. 18.
[75] John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 1979, no. 5.

with Jesus and to model one's life after his. Pope Francis notes the key importance of catechesis with youth and young adults rooted in Jesus Christ, reminding us that:

> Any educational project or path of growth for young people must certainly include formation in Christian doctrine and morality. It is likewise important that it have two main goals. One is the development of the *kerygma*, the foundational experience of encounter with God through Christ's death and resurrection. The other is growth in fraternal love, community life and service.[76]

Evangelizing catechesis has many expressions. For example, formation can and should take place in the home as parents, grandparents, and families share the Catholic faith with their sons and daughters; it may also occur within religious education or classroom settings, in youth or young adult ministries, in informal dialogue groups, one-on-one conversations, dynamic presentations, online learning, and post-event processing, through visual art, theater, or music, and during the sacramental preparation for Confirmation, Marriage, or the Baptism of children of young adults. There are many learning styles and educational methods that can be used in the proclamation of faith. The *Directory for Catechesis* articulated the tasks for catechesis, modeling the way Jesus formed his own disciples: "knowledge of the faith; initiating into the celebration of the mystery; forming for life in Christ; teaching to pray; and introducing to community life."[77]

Pastoral leaders accompanying youth and young adults, in concert with their families, share the faith as outlined in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This includes a presentation of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and all the Scriptures; the celebration of faith through prayer, liturgy, and the sacraments, rooted in the community of the Church; our moral and ethical teachings, grounded in the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes; Catholic social teaching; and the call of the Lord to each person to take up their vocation and mission in the world. Forming young people in the art of discernment[78] is also critical, as this process can make their vocational journey, conscience development, and making good decisions in life more fruitful and Gospel-oriented.

[76] CV, no. 213.
[77] DFC, no. 79.
[78] See *Christus Vivit*, chapter 9 (paragraphs 278-298) for Pope Francis' insights on the art of discernment.

Comprehensive faith formation should also involve a variety of people as a young person matures into adulthood. Parents are the primary catechists, and their ministry is complemented and supported by other family members, in particular grandparents and the elderly, other trusted adults in the community, pastors and pastoral ministers, teachers, and mentors. This extensive list highlights that ministries with youth and young adults are enriched when they are extensively intergenerational and intercultural. Families need support in the formation of young people, and the witness and generosity of others in the community can aid the long-term growth of youth and young adults. Servant of God Sr. Thea Bowman, FSPA, reminded us of this, saying, "It takes a whole Church to raise a child"[79] and "the Church is a family of families and the family got to stay together and… if we walk and talk and work and play and stand together in Jesus' name – we'll be who we say we are – truly Catholic."[80] Families evangelize families, and this missionary mutuality is an effective means of the faith formation of young people within those families.

Sharing the Truth in Love

Since adolescence begins with puberty and since young adulthood is often marked by dating, marriage, and parenthood, it is essential that young people be given a clear proclamation of the Church's teaching on human sexuality to help them navigate significant life transitions. We must share the truth in love, with warmth and genuine concern. Additionally, helping young people appreciate the importance of reason and discernment in the face of emotions during these formative years can be incredibly beneficial. Indeed, a basic understanding of Church teaching on human sexuality, such as was explained by St. John Paul II in his writings on the "Theology of the Body," is essential for youth, collegians, and young adults, so that they can "accept and acknowledge their sexual identity"[81] and can approach the choices they make, not as a "no to sex," but a "yes" to the beauty and gift that God has for them. This includes sharing the distinction between lust and love, and the personal witness to overcome disordered sexual desires that is achieved in chastity. Evangelizing catechesis in the deeply personal area of sexuality includes being a witness to virtuous choices and sharing the witness of the Word of God in Scripture and Tradition to the right use of sexuality according to one's state in life. These lovingly reveal the reasons why sexual activity is

[79] Adapting it from the Ghanian proverb "It takes a village to raise a child." Quoted in *Renewing the Vision*, p. 59.
[80] Sr. Thea Bowman, "Address to the U.S. Bishop's Conference," June 1989, p. 5.
[81] CCC no. 2333.

inseparable from marriage and the openness to children, why the truth and beauty of fertility are to be appreciated, why contraception harms God's design for married love, and why pornography is evil. Moreover, they provide the foundation for the Church's acceptance of Natural Family Planning methods.[82] It has been encouraging to see innovative and inspirational resources from ministries dedicated to helping youth and young adults live out the virtue of chastity.

The teachings of the Church regarding human sexuality are clear: each person is loved and valued, yet same-sex activity and any sexual acts outside marriage are rejected as they are sinful. We seek to lovingly accompany and form those who experience same-sex attraction or are sexually active beyond marriage in a way that is both relevant to their desires and faithful to the teachings of the faith. Many young people who struggle in these ways do not believe the Church is the place for them; and sometimes those in faith communities might react with judgment and may not be equipped to offer loving support. As a result, the Church loses out on the presence of many young people—not just those with same-sex attraction, gender discordance, or who are sexually active, but others who are sympathetic to their sufferings and yet are unable to offer a witness to carry other young people beyond these sufferings.[83] The Church, then, must welcome and offer a place for listening, healing, and communicating the truth of the Gospel to all young people. We have a God who is willing to run after us, even when we are going in a wrong direction, like the two disciples who were initially headed to Emmaus.

Related to this, we recognize that many of the Church's social teachings on topics such as abortion, bioethics, the death penalty, euthanasia, immigration, war, crime, ecology, family life, and access to health care can be challenging to the political perspectives of young people. Pastoral leaders and families must exhibit courage to speak these truths with love and patience, as well as sharing with youth and young adults the responsibility of defending the life and dignity of all persons in society.

We also look to the young, especially faithful young disciples who have personally experienced various struggles related to these moral, social, and ethical issues, to help Catholic communities more lovingly reflect and communicate what God has revealed about the dignity of the human person, sexual desire, right relationship with others, social justice, and the universal call to holiness

[82] See USCCB, *Called to the Joy of Love* (CJL) (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2021), pp. 19, 20.
[83] For more, see USCCB, *Ministry to Persons with Homosexual Inclination* (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2006).

for all.[84] Family members and friends who accompany young people can respond to challenging topics such as these with truth, humility, clarity, and charity.[85] One cannot have a fruitful conversation about these issues and speak the truth with love without relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and, as much as possible, centering the conversation on Jesus Christ, who came so that his disciples would "know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32). This important and patient process leads to proper conscience formation, to the development of a conscience that is "nourished in prayer, enlightened by study, structured by the Gospel, and guided by the teachings of the Church."[86] When properly done, the ministry of catechesis and conscience formation can present young people with a systematic presentation of the faith so they might truly understand what it means to be a missionary disciple of Christ: to turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus and the traditions of the Church.

There is a great virtue in helping young people claim and appropriate the values of their faith and tap into the timeless witness and wisdom of the saints, "so that they are better prepared to witness to the kingdom of truth in the world."[87] Youth and young adults can then see for themselves that faith and reason are never opposed, but rather "are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth."[88] Similarly, good formation with young people can dispel the false claim that science and faith are opposed to one another or that science disproves God or the doctrines or dogmas of the Catholic Church. When truths revealed by God are not in accord with the common assumptions in the cultures in which young people live or the presuppositions that they might carry, those truths need to be explained "with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pt 3:16), without watering down the faith or avoiding the issues altogether. Parents and pastoral leaders are called to be versed in how best to respond to these challenges, with the support of their local bishops and pastors.

All those who catechize are ultimately called to be *witnesses* of the Catholic faith, teachers, and accompaniers,[89] guided by the Holy Spirit "the true protagonist of all authentic catechesis."[90] By

[84] See CCC no. 2359.
[85] See USCCB, *Called to the Joy of Love* (2022), p. 36-37.
[86] USCCB, *Empowered by the Spirit: Campus Ministry Faces Its Future* (1985), no. 63.
[87] *Empowered by the Spirit*, no. 53.
[88] John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (1998), preface.
[89] See DFC, no. 113
[90] DFC, no. 112

the virtues and faithful actions of a parent or pastoral ministry leader, a young person will be able to see how the Catholic faith is to be lived, even in the face of uncertainties and challenges.

Renewing Sacramental Life

It was "in the breaking of the bread" (Lk 24:35) that the two disciples headed to Emmaus finally recognized Jesus. The critical significance of the Eucharistic revelation within the telling of this story reminds us that sacramental encounters are key moments in formation and accompaniment.

Ministries with youth and young adults provide opportunities to invite young people into liturgical and sacramental celebrations which help them understand and receive the true presence of Christ in their lives. Pastoral leaders and families can pass onto young people how Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—their Sacraments of Initiation into the family of the Church—"lay the foundations of every Christian life."[91] The prominence of the sacramental life within these ministries reveals how Jesus continues the work of "healing and salvation"[92] in the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. The graces of Holy Orders and Matrimony, often entered into within young adulthood, "are directed towards the salvation of others."[93] The great breadth of the sacramental life and a grounding in Scripture, then, are keys to any effective pastoral work with younger generations, as they have the transformative power to heal so much of what young people are facing today. In this, we call to mind Blessed Carlos Manuel Rodríguez Santiago ("Blessed Charlie"), a lay catechist from Puerto Rico whose passion for the young and whose love of the sacramental life and Scriptures helped form young people into active appreciation and connection of the liturgy and the sacraments to their everyday lives.

Above and beyond anything we do in this world to listen and teach is the grace of God, wonderfully offered in the Eucharist, freely given for our salvation and transformation. It is our work to introduce young people to this gift, to facilitate this sacred encounter in any way we can, so that Christ can encounter us. This is the ultimate teachable moment.

[91] CCC, no. 1212.
[92] CCC, no. 1421.
[93] CCC, no. 1534.

Youth and young adults are called to a personal relationship with God, but not an individualistic one. The Eucharistic community reminds us of this. Young people are invited to be a part of a family of faith and to strengthen it through their participation in the life of the Church. The saving work of Jesus, accomplished through his suffering, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, continues preeminently in the sacraments. "The Church's liturgy, by its very nature as a proclamation and enactment of the Good News of salvation, is an evangelical act."[94] Through the witness and invitation of other disciples, young people can enter into a full, active, and conscious participation in the Mass. The sacramental life gives a rich foundation to what comes next.

St. Paul VI wrote that, "The role of evangelization is precisely to educate people in the faith in such a way as to lead each individual Christian to live the sacraments as true sacraments of faith—and not to receive them passively or reluctantly."[95] This is especially important considering the many transitions that occur within youth and young adulthood. Wherever they are, Jesus Christ is always present for them in the Sacraments, most especially the Eucharist, "the sum and summary of our faith"[96] In these sacramental experiences, youth and young adults can have a renewed sense of belonging, knowing that Christ and the Church are always present for them, "until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). There is no escaping this love. That is what the two disciples on the road to Emmaus saw in the breaking of the bread, the act that always points to the Cross, the sacrificial death of the Lord, the divine love unto death. This is what we hope that young people can come to understand about the Lord in the sacramental life of the Church.

From Teaching to Mission

By proclaiming the kerygma, passing on an evangelizing catechesis, sharing the truth in love, and helping people encounter Jesus in the Eucharist, ministries with youth, collegians, and young adults can foster growth in a relationship with the Trinity, "who sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child, then also an heir, through God" (Gal 4:6-7). As we equip young people with the truth of Christ's radiant light and patiently accompany and mentor them through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they can grow into

[94] LMD, p. 16.
[95] EN, no. 47.
[96] CCC, no. 1327.

the mission to which God has called them. We teach young people so that they will have the tools necessary to embark on their mission and vocation, through this missionary work, in whatever form it takes. In addition to the Gospels, the Rosary offers yet another opportunity to personally accompany a young person on his or her spiritual journey. As St. John Paul II told us, "With the Rosary, the Christian people *sits at the school of Mary* and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love."[97] In summary, then, the principal act of faithful pastoral leaders and families who accompany youth or young adults is "to be witnesses of the Gospel wherever they find themselves, by the way they live."[98]

In fact, the Gospel contains the greatest story of all time, the love of God for humanity made possible through the "yes" of a young person (Mary), through whom Jesus, "the Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14), came into the world. Young people need to *see* this message alive in the actions of pastoral ministers who live as strong faithful witnesses of the Gospel and *hear* this message explicitly and boldly declared. "The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed."[99] In this, we remember Blessed Carlo Acutis, an Italian teenager who, in the twenty-first century, shared the Good News of Christ's presence in the Eucharist through the means of digital communications. His knowledge and understanding of the faith, even at a young age, gave him the confidence and motivation to step into his mission.

The Catholic community is one that goes forth, bringing the light of Christ to the world. Those called to pastoral ministry with young people operate through the Church and boldly invite those they serve to embrace the Church, "to live the faith together" and "show our love by living in community."[100] In the passing on of faith to the young through the accompaniment of their families, friends, and pastoral leaders, we move with young people toward the mission of the Church, so that we can, in turn, bring Christ's light wherever we go from here.

[97] John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (2002), 1.
[98] CV, no. 175.
[99] EN, no 22.
[100] CV, no. 164.

SECTION 3: SENDING

They set out at once and returned to Jerusalem. (Lk 24:33)

Through the breaking of the bread, Jesus enflames the hearts of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They exclaim with joy as he disappears from their presence, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" (Lk 24:32) Immediately, they set out on a mission to share the Good News of the risen Christ to any who would listen (see Lk 24:33-35). In this, Christ has disappeared into the mission of the Church.[101] Through this miracle, we discover that it is God who makes our missionary work fruitful.

In much the same way, one of the goals of the Church's accompaniment of youth and young adults is to guide them toward their mission to transform the world toward the Kingdom of God. St. John Paul II told the young people gathered in Denver, Colorado, for World Youth Day, "Do not be afraid to go out to the streets and into public places… This is no time to be ashamed of the Gospel… It is the time to preach it from the rooftops… It is you who must 'go out into the byroads' (Mt 22:9) and invite everyone you meet to the banquet which God has prepared."[102] Pope Francis similarly encouraged the youth and young adults at World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland, saying: "The times we live in do not call for young 'couch potatoes' …Today's world demands that you be a protagonist of history because life is always beautiful when we choose to live it fully, when we choose to leave a mark."[103] This is the mission that Jesus offers our young people.

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the time for that mission is immediate. St. Luke tells us that "they set out at once" (Lk 24:33) for their newfound mission, despite the lateness of the hour and the dark and dangerous conditions they may face (see Lk 24:29). Christ sends young people today with a similar sense of immediacy. "The haste of the young woman of Nazareth is the haste of those who have received extraordinary gifts from the Lord and feel compelled to share them, to let the immense grace that they have experienced be poured out upon others."[104] Thus, the result of our

[101] See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church* (1986), 168, and *Theo-Drama: Theological-Dramatic Theory*, vol. III (1978), p. 350.
[102] John Paul II, "Homily for the Eucharistic Celebration for VIII World Youth Day," Cherry Creek State Park, Denver (Vatican City: LEV, 1993), no. 6.
[103] Francis, "Address for the Prayer Vigil with the Young People for XXXI World Youth Day," Campus Misericordiae, Krakow (Vatican City: LEV, 2016).
[104] Francis, "Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the XXXVII World Youth Day" (Vatican City: LEV: 2022).

ministries should point young people toward their mission, motivating them to go where Christ is calling them. The Church, having listened and taught them, now encourages them to choose to follow the path God has offered them for their lives.

Bold Evangelizing Witnesses

Upon recognizing and understanding the Lord in their midst, the first mission of the two disciples in the Emmaus story was to share the Good News that "Christ is alive,"[105] a message that continues to resonate through the ages. This evangelizing witness is the starting point for all Christian mission. Just as it is critical to proclaim Christ to the young, it is equally as important to equip youth and young adults to proclaim Christ to the world. "If we can hear what the Spirit is saying to us, we have to realize that youth [and young adult] ministry is always missionary."[106] Before he ascended to the Father, Jesus told his apostles to "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19) and this Great Commission extends down through the ages for "the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature."[107] When a young person has come to recognize Christ in their midst, through the efforts of pastoral leaders and families who accompany them, it follows that he or she will want to share that joyful encounter with others, especially other youth and young adults.

The Church has long recognized that the young are excellent evangelists and witnesses of the Gospel among their peers, many of whom need the Good News in their lives. The Second Vatican Council noted that youth and young adults "should become the first to carry on the apostolate directly to other young persons, concentrating their apostolic efforts within their own circle, according to the needs of the social environment in which they live."[108] Christ longs to encounter all youth and young adults, including those who are less active in the practice of faith. Young people can let the Lord work through them as they listen with love to their peers, share the Gospel in ways that make sense to their generation, and soften hearts to hear God's call.

[105] CV, no. 1.
[106] CV, no. 240; the addition of the words "and young adult" are added for context in the United States.
[107] AG, no. 2.
[108] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 12.

When Jesus called forth the Twelve Apostles, he sent them out two-by-two to potentially face difficulties, danger, or even death (see Mt 10:1-15). In a similar way, the Church's ministries with young people can empower youth and young adults to be sent out on this evangelizing mission into the unknown, not holding them back thinking they require advanced age or experience or shielding them from discomfort or rejection. In this, we recall the example of Blessed Isidore Bakanja, a lay young adult from Congo who, having been evangelized by Cistercian missionaries, "was tortured at length for having proposed Christianity to other young people."[109] In 1909, at age twenty-two, he was martyred for his bold evangelizing witness to Jesus Christ.

Families and ministries with young people today must encourage each youth and young adult to take on this enthusiastic spirit, "even those who are most frail, limited, and troubled" and embrace a missionary approach for all the interactions of their lives, "for goodness can always be shared, even if it exists alongside many limitations." [110] The Church flourishes when young people choose to share Christ with their peers and those who are younger—and even evangelize their parents and older generations. Pope Francis noted that "anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love."[111]

With Charity and Justice

The proclamation of the *kerygma* also means sharing in the Lord's command to offer food and clothing to those in need, to care for and be present to those who suffer or are imprisoned, and to welcome the stranger, for as Jesus said, "whatever you did for these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40). Pope Francis reminds us that "social engagement and direct contact with the poor remain fundamental ways of finding or deepening one's faith and the discernment of one's vocation."[112] The works of charity and justice naturally flow from evangelization.

It is important to encourage youth and young adults whose hearts are on fire for Christ to draw near to those on the margins of society, the very company Jesus kept. This means helping young people

[109] CV, no. 59.
[110] CV, no. 239.
[111] EG, no. 120.
[112] CV, no. 170.

become invested in communities overwhelmed with poverty, violence, and ecological degradation; with mothers, fathers, and families through the path of pregnancy; with those at the border and in migrant and refugee travels; within cultural families affected by prejudice, racism, and a disparity of resources; and with those lacking support systems, including persons with disabilities and those impacted by mental health concerns. We cannot foster fear or indifference to the tragedies felt by so many people, but rather must encourage joy and active involvement.

In this, we reflect on the ministry of Venerable Augustus Tolton, the first priest of acknowledged African descent in the United States, who, as a young adult in his early 30s, took up his mission to serve marginalized communities against great adversity and racism. "Tolton reminds us of the courage we have within our hearts to continue to work for racial and ethnic solidarity while eradicating all forms of hesitancy and intolerances."[113] The example of Father Tolton is a testament to the ways in which young people today can use their gifts that are "directed above all to charity within the family and to social and political charity. It is a concrete and faith-based commitment to the building of a new society. It involves living amid society and the world in order to bring the Gospel everywhere, to work for the growth of peace, harmony, justice, human rights, and mercy, and thus for the extension of God's kingdom in this world."[114]

Equipping young people for justice and engaging in charitable works[115] are key components to the Church's ministries with youth and young adults, contributing to the missionary impulse of communities of faith. "Teachers, who have the challenging task of training children and youth [and young adults] … should be conscious that their responsibility extends also to the moral, spiritual, and social aspects of life. The values of freedom, mutual respect, and solidarity can be handed on from a tender age."[116] As youth and young adults come to widen their perspectives and choose to set out into the world, Christ sends them forth to transform society toward his image. As pastoral

[113] Bishop Joseph N. Perry, "About Fr. Augustus Tolton," Archdiocese of Chicago: Augustus Tolton Canonization Cause, https://tolton.archchicago.org/about/biography.
[114] CV, no. 168.
[115] The USCCB encourages "two feet of love and action" with the promotion of both charitable works (addressing immediate needs and providing emergency assistance) and social justice (addressing systemic, root causes that affect many people). More information can be found online at https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/two-feet-of-love-in-action.
[116] FT, no. 114.

leaders, parents, and families, our work is to give young people the tools[117] they will need to respond to this radical invitation from the Lord through works of charity and social justice.

Vocational Discernment

Just as the disciples coming back from Emmaus followed their own path back to Jerusalem, youth and young adults today have before them a road that leads to their salvation. The Church's work is to support each young person as he or she discerns a vocational pathway. Vocation, in a broad sense, is a "call to missionary service to others. The Lord calls us to share in (the Lord's) work of creation and to contribute to the common good by using the gifts we have received."[118] In this, we look to the example of St. Thérèse of Lisieux in the nineteenth century, whose path led her to consecrated religious life with the Carmelite community. In reflecting on her life, she said, "O Jesus, my Love, at last I have found my vocation. My vocation is love!"[119]

This is what every young person has before them: an opportunity to be "love" to the world. Ministries with youth, collegians, and young adults can help young people hear the voice of God, to discern their vocation, "something more than merely a pragmatic decision. In the end, it is a recognition of why I was made, why I am here on earth, and what the Lord's plan is for my life."[120] This discernment is carried out with the loving accompaniment and mentorship of pastoral ministers in the Church who, following the prompting of the Holy Spirit in their own lives, share with young people a peace and joy that the world cannot give (see Jn 14:27).

The first vocation to which all are invited, and that pastoral leaders and families can emphasize with young people, is the universal call to holiness. It starts with developing a holy friendship with Jesus, "the basis of all else,"[121] inspiring true friendship with others. Holiness is not just about *doing* but also about *being:* being a child of the Father, being a friend of Jesus, and being a temple of the Holy Spirit. Seeing all others as brothers and sisters in Christ creates a new perspective—"it is an

[117] These "tools" are best when developed locally by pastoral leaders, supported by the ministerial resources of national organizations, movements, and other communities engaged in the work of peace and justice.
[118] CV, no. 253.
[119] Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux* (Chapter 11).
[120] CV, no. 256.
[121] CV, no. 250.

invitation to bring a heightened sense of the presence of Jesus Christ into the regular rhythms of life."[122] By cultivating a life of prayer, one can hear, discern, and answer the voice of God. Fostering an active and contemplative relationship with God is essential for ministries with young people, with the loving support of family, culture, and community.

Prayerful openness can yield a deep discernment, providing an opportunity for a young person to be transformed by Christ and to recognize God's work in their lives, their personal history, and the world around them.[123] Through the power of the Spirit, one turns from sin and grows in virtue, joining the Church, the family of God on earth, in her mission of "building of an authentic civilization of truth and love."[124] We look at vocation in this broader sense, rooted in Baptism and lived out in marriage, single life, the workplace, priesthood, and other forms of consecration.[125] It is vital to believe that God wants our happiness! What will make young people find joy and happiness is being able to discern their mission and then doing it. It will be different for each person, who is meant to carry Christ's love into the world in his or her own distinctive way. Once that is prayerfully discerned, our work in ministry is to facilitate the journey guided by the Holy Spirit, always inviting them to always go deeper.

Being young is also a time of self-discovery and exploration. The community of faith and its ministries, as well as the families of young people, can be active in affirming the gifts that God has given to a young person and in providing opportunities for those gifts to be exercised in his or her vocation. Being young is "the privileged season for life choices and for responding to God's call," and therefore all ministries with the young should have a "vocational slant."[126] In every era of history, young people have grappled with similar questions: Why am I here? What am I meant to do? Who am I called to be? Where am I being called to go? How can I use my gifts? How can I make the world a better place? These foundational questions can fuel the process of vocational discernment. Ministries with youth, collegians, and young adults share the "art of discernment" in helping them respond to God's call. "Good discernment is a path of freedom that brings to full fruit

[122] USCCB, *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults* (1996), p. 18.
[123] See CV, no. 282.
[124] John Paul II, Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae,* 1995, no. 6.
[125] See CV no. 259-276.
[126] FD, no. 140.

what is unique in each person, something so personal that only God knows it."[127] Effective ministry guides youth and young adults to choose how they will transform the world through the gift of their lives. We must regularly nurture and grow a culture of vocation and discernment within all settings and activities in which young people participate: in their homes, in their parishes, in their educational institutions, in their professional lives, and among their peers.

Young people should be presented with positive experiences so they may learn from those who joyfully live out their vocational calling: faithful married couples, devoted priests and consecrated women and men, and active Catholics of all generations infusing their work and life's pursuits with the light of the Gospel. Pastoral leaders, vocation ministers, and families can invite young people to consider all the ways in which God may be calling them in life: as a priest or consecrated religious woman or man, as a deacon or a lay ecclesial minister, as a married person, or as a single person invested in their baptismal call to holiness. Through this process, we can guide a young person with "courage, warmth, and tact" to "discern the salutary promptings of the good Spirit."[128]

Faithful Protagonists Today

Even as Christ calls many people to their future vocation within their youth and young adulthood, the notion that they are just the Church of *tomorrow* can ignore the fact that youth and young adults are impacting the Church and the world *today*. One of the tasks of ministries with the younger generations is to encourage youth and young adults to be a "living part of the Church, protagonists of her mission"[129] and co-responsible leaders active in their faith at this very moment.

The Church looks to raise up dedicated young people who choose to bring hope to a weary world and bear the love of the Lord in situations fraught with anxiety, hatred, and polarization—often in ways unique to their generation and culture. While we recognize "protagonism" is a unique word to our U.S. ears, it is one that Pope Francis uses on many occasions to describe young leaders, in particular when he notices "young people throughout the world who have taken to the streets to express the desire for a more just and fraternal society" and encourages them to "be protagonists of

[127] CV, no. 295.
[128] Ibid, no. 293.
[129] Francis, "Angelus," November 21, 2021.

this transformation."[130] The Church desires that young people not wait until they are older to step up into leadership positions or to delay impacting the world inspired by their Catholic faith. The bishops of the United States pray that youth and young adults, with their hearts set on fire and guided by the Holy Spirit, begin to step into the mission to transfigure the world right now.

It is through the Eucharistic celebration that God sends people on mission every day. It is called "Holy Mass (*Missa*), because the liturgy in which the mystery of salvation is accomplished concludes with the sending forth (*missio*) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God's will in their daily lives."[131] Encouraging young people to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, and even daily Mass, can generate a vocational and missionary impulse in their hearts when youth and young adults take seriously the directive to "go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life."[132] This connection to the Eucharistic community also highlights an important component of mission: to continually return to our origins and to remember our roots—home, family, parish, culture, and community.

We call to mind Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, a young person from twentieth-century Italy who stepped forward in his youth and young adulthood to engage in works of justice, charity, and solidarity with the poor, immerse himself in daily prayers and liturgy, boldly share his Catholic faith with his peers, and constantly discern his vocation and mission, while also staying rooted in his family and local community. His love of Christ, his commitment to the Church, and his devotion to the Eucharist gave him the strength and vigor to allow the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to permeate his young life and inform his actions as he impacted the realities of all those he encountered with the love of the Lord. His example of taking action in the present moment can be a great inspiration for youth and young adults setting out on their own missionary paths today.

Special mention should also be made of World Youth Days, which have rekindled the Christian faith among countless youth, collegians, and young adults through the years, moving them toward leadership in the Church upon returning home. These global gatherings have inspired successive generations of pilgrims to discern their vocations—to the Sacraments of Marriage and Holy Orders,

[130] CV, no. 174.
[131] CCC, no. 1332.
[132] One of the common dismissals said at the conclusion of Holy Mass.

to consecrated life and lay ecclesial ministries; and in the living out of their baptismal call to holiness—and bring the Gospel home with them. The pastoral leaders and communities who continue to accompany the young to these and similar experiences are blessings to the Church, as they support youth and young adult pilgrims in the living out of their Catholic faith.

We are also greatly encouraged by the youth and young adults across the United States who are already stepping forward as faithful "protagonists." We are grateful for peer ministry leaders and those who actively engage in their parishes, universities, and dioceses/eparchies; those who name, confront, and work to dismantle systems of racism and prejudice; those who resist and rise above the various ideologies in our society that are polarizing communities; those who walk with moms in need and those in poverty; those who advocate for immigration reform, religious freedom, and the end to the evil of abortion; those who are stewards of creation, advocating for ecological protection; those supporting men and women experiencing anxiety, depression, and mental health issues, as well as persons with disabilities; and those who, inspired by silence, contemplation, and devotion within the Church, engage in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.[133]

Even within the ordinary life of a young person—at work, in school, within the home or local community, or at times of rest and recreation—this activity manifests itself through the quiet witness of kindness, sensitivity, compassion, and being an ethically and morally responsible individual. All young people of faith are called to step forward, for the Holy Spirit has graced each of them with gifts "to promote the building of the kingdom of God in the world today, thereby bringing about the transformation of society."[134] From the young Catholic scout to the teenager with disabilities and from the collegian attracted to the transcendence of the liturgy to the young adult actively engaged in works of justice, this mission is possible for everyone.

Just as the disciples on the road to Emmaus with Jesus had their hearts converted by the Lord, they immediately moved toward their mission—as God sent them out to move the hearts of all whom they would encounter next. We are called to do the same for and with young people, to send them forth as they move further along the path God has laid out for them in their lives.

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[133] These examples are taken from several synodal listening sessions (noted earlier) as well as from the insights found in the compilation resource, *Moving Boldly into the Future* (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2022).
[134] USCCB, *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults* (1996), p. 37.

CONCLUSION

With that, their eyes were opened. (Lk 24:31)

Many people of faith have been called to accompany youth and young adults, to listen, teach, and send them forth, guided by the Holy Spirit. We thank God for their willingness to step forward as "wise and generous guides"[135] to young people, so that the next generations may come to know the sacred presence of Jesus in their lives and recognize that "Christ is alive!"[136]

This journey is a reminder that many of us were also accompanied by our parents, families, pastors, teachers, mentors, and friends in youth and young adulthood, indeed the whole community of faith, both visible and invisible. In our own unique ways, we once experienced a sense of welcome, belonging, and integration into a loving community, where faith was shared, taught, and rooted into our lives. From there, we were sent forth into the world as missionary disciples.[137] Having walked our own road before with Jesus (see Lk 24:15), we can humbly *listen* with love to the stories and experiences of younger generations, so that they might recognize Christ in their midst. We can *teach* and share the love of Jesus and the wisdom of the Gospel, guiding them to interpret it all in light of their lived experiences. And as their hearts burn within them (see Lk 24:32), we can help them hear the voice of God who *sends* them toward their vocation and mission, which we pray they will choose to follow as we once did.

We are joined in spirit by holy women and men from the United States who, over the centuries, also devoted their lives to helping youth and young adults encounter God and know his love for them, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. These dedicated servants of God, saints and wisdom figures in our homes, churches, and communities, had the "farsightedness to appreciate the little flame that continues to burn" and "the ability to discern pathways (and) recognize potential."[138] We now inherit the legacy they received from the generations of Christians before them.

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[135] Francis, "Prayer for Young People," *L'Osservatore Romano,* weekly edition in English, number 15, 14 April 2017.
[136] CV, no. 1.
[137] This methodology follows the flow laid out in *Living as Missionary Disciples* (USCCB, 2017), p. 9.
[138] CV, no. 67.

We also remember that, while age and experience can be important to transmit faith and guide a young person, the Holy Spirit speaks through the wisdom of youth and young adults themselves. This cannot be overlooked. Recognizing that what young people "say can provide some light to help [the Church] better understand the Gospel."[139] For older generations, this requires a humility to recognize that, when we "journey together… we can learn from one another, warm hearts, inspire minds with the light of the Gospel, and lend new strength to our hands."[140] It is a reminder that youth and young adults are truly "the *now* of God."[141]

Yet even still, there remains a great need in the Church's ministries with youth and young adults for more women and men within faith communities to step up and be willing to "put out into the deep" (Lk 5:4) for the sake of the young.[142] To move in this direction, we pray for a greater investment in these particular pastoral ministries (with youth, with collegians, and with young adults) within the Catholic Church. We hope that dedicated pastoral ministers, parents and grandparents and families, teachers and catechists, and the young people themselves will respond to Christ's invitation to be "gifted and generous co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord,"[143] co-responsible with the Church's bishops and pastors in the shepherding of souls and passing on faith to each generation.

The communal dimension of the Catholic faith shows us that those who accompany youth and young adults are most effective when they work in collaboration with the entire community. In particular, we look to other ministerial efforts, especially those in family ministries, to work together for the accompaniment and formation of young people. All ministries with youth and young adults are part of our universal family of faith. It is important, then, to pay attention to the synodal concept of *pastoral de conjunto* (or "communion in mission"), cherished for decades among Hispanic Catholics and now a gift to the rest of the Church: "the harmonious coordination of all elements of pastoral ministry, the actions of all the pastoral ministers… not only a methodology, but also the expression of the essence and mission of the Church, to be and to create communion."[144] The Church in this way works together across an interconnected network of

[139] See CV, no 41.
[140] CV 199.
[141] CV, no. 178.
[142] See John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Inuente* (2000), nos. 1-2, 15.
[143] USCCB, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2005), p. 67.
[144] *Proceedings and Conclusions*, English section, p. 227.

ministerial fields for the good of the mission entrusted to us by Christ. As such, the Church moves forward in these ministries as a "community on a journey."[145]

In anticipation of the next steps of this journey, one might wonder: where are we going? Pope Francis envisioned a future that will "nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge, awaken prophecies and enable hope to blossom."[146] The Church welcomes a revitalization of enthusiasm for the Catholic faith, a realization of dreams which are present across all generations and cultures, the prophetic voice of young people calling upon society and the Church to grow closer to the Gospel, and the hope that can blossom when the community of faith is engaged as one Church journeying together. In writing this framework, we look to local faith communities to apply these broad directives (*listen-teach-send*) to their specific situation through careful reflection, discernment, and active planning. This simple triptych can be unpacked in ways that respond to the specific realities being experienced by youth and young adults in every community across the country.

Pope Francis concluded *Christus Vivit* by encouraging youth and young adults to "keep running the race … outstripping all those who are slow or fearful,"[147] yet also reminding them to be patient with the Church and with one another. Yes, the journey continues, but it is sometimes slower than we initially planned. In a similar way, the bishops of the United States conclude this document with an encouragement for all her faithful—young and old together—to persevere and to be patient in this important work of intentionally accompanying youth and young adults.

We recognize that ministry will not always be easy, nor will things change overnight. However, it is fulfilling, and through it, we can live an abundant life, promised by Jesus Christ (see Jn 10:10). With the Lord by our side, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and with the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary who always looks after the Church, we look forward to this sacred journey of pastoral accompaniment and the heavenly destination that lies ahead of each of us.

[145] CV, no. 29.
[146] CV, no. 199.
[147] CV, no.299.